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Some Material on Kennedy Destroyed

2 Ceiling Panels 'Proved Nothing,' Police Tell Council

AUG 22 1975

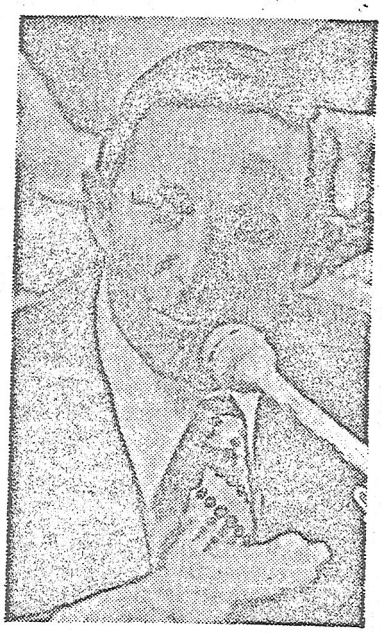
BY WILLIAM FARR
Times Staff Writer

Two ceiling panels taken from the Ambassador pantry where Sen. Robert F. Kennedy was fatally shot were routinely destroyed a year after the assassination because they "proved absolutely nothing," Asst. Police Chief Daryl Gates told the Los Angeles City Council Thursday.

Aides had been summoned before the council as the result of a motion by Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky expressing concern over reports that several items of evidence in the case were missing.

During a discussion before the council Thursday, Yaroslavsky told Gates:

"One would have thought that after all of the problems with the John F. Kennedy assassination, the Police Department would be a little more sensitive to the preservation of evidence."



Daryl Gates
Times photo

Yaroslavsky made specific reference to the missing panels and also wanted to know the whereabouts of the Xrays of the panels, spectrographic tests on the bullets and the left sleeve of Robert Kennedy's coat.

Aides countered that these items were not technically evidence since none of them had been introduced at the trial of Sirhan B. Sirhan, convicted of the assassination in 1968.

Dion Morrow, epecial counsel to the city attorney's office on the Kennedy matter, told the council that all of the evidence introduced at the trial was in the possession of the Superior Court clerk, not the Police Department.

There have been questions recently about the possibility of a second gun being fired in the pantry the night the senator was fatally shot.

Some critics of the police investigation claim that the ceiling panels are of crucial importance because the number of bullet holes in the ceiling could determine whether more shots were fired than could have come from Sirhan's eight-shot Iver Johnson .22-caliber pistol.

Asked about the value of the ceiling panels as evidence, Gates replied:

"They have absolutely no value whatsoever. All of the testing, the real important testing, as far as trajectory and the line of fire and the number of bullet holes, that was done prior to their removal (from the ceiling).

"The removal was done simply because we were making a very exhaustive examination of every conceivable material . . . We made those tests and they showed absolutely nothing. They proved absolutely nothing. They did nothing so far as supporting the investigation or supporting the guilt or innocence of anyone."

Gates said Xrays of the ceiling panel had been made, a statement that contradicted Morrow's assertion Wednesday that the panel were not X-rayed.

"The records of the Xrays and the Xrays themselves are not in existence," Gates said in explaining the seeming discrepancy between his version and that of Morrow.

Gates also said that reports that no spectrographic tests were made on the bullets probably are inaccurate.

Referring to criminalist DeWayne Wolfer, Gates said, "His memory is easy about it but . . . he believes he did make a spectrographic analysis. Ordinarily he would not have conducted a spectrographic analysis but because we were being so thorough, I think he did."

It was explained at an earlier session of the council that the left sleeve to Kennedy's coat had disappeared prior to Sirhan's 1968 trial and is believed to have been cut off by persons who were attempting to render medical aid to the senator.

In a related development Thursday, the Police Commission established a procedure for answering questions posed by persons interested in the assassination investigation.

Two weeks ago, the commission had turned down formal requests by CBS and Paul Schrade to make the Police Department's investigative files on the case open to the public, including a 10-volume summary of the investigation.

CBS and Schrade, one of the five other persons wounded in the pantry the night Kennedy was fatally shot,

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KENNEDY MATERIAL

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have taken court action in an effort to open the Police Department files.

Although they had vetoed the request by the television network and Schrade, several commissioners felt that a method should be developed for inquiries to be answered.

The procedure announced Thursday calls for the questions to be posed in writing. They will be answered in written form by a committee comprised of Police Commissioner Marian Foelzer, Gates, two police investigators and a representative of the city attorney's office.

The procedure also allows for the questioner to meet with a representative of this group if elaboration on the answer is sought.

In announcing the procedure, Commission President Samuel Williams said:

"We hope to provide the fullest possible access to the material while doing everything in our power to protect the rights of privacy of innocent individuals and the integrity of the Police Department's investigative process."

Williams expressed dismay that Yaroslavsky took the matter up before the full council and asked that future inquiries by councilmen be directed to the Police Commission instead.